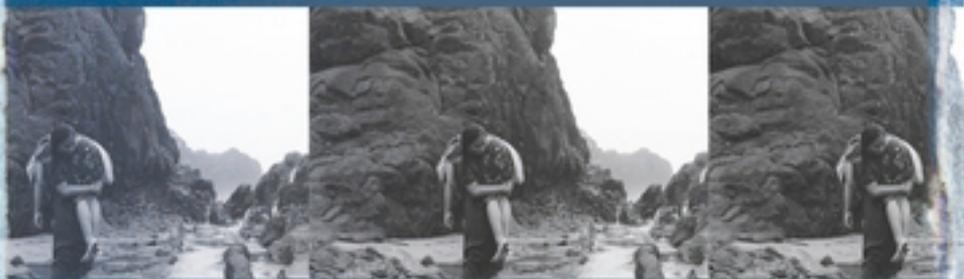


THE GLOBAL AUTEUR

THE POLITICS OF AUTHORSHIP
IN 21ST CENTURY CINEMA

EDITED BY SEUNG-HOON JEONG
AND JEREMI SZANIAWSKI



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The Global Auteur

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The Politics of Authorship in 21st Century Cinema

*Edited by Seung-hoon Jeong and
Jeremi Szaniawski*

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The editors

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Introduction

*Seung-hoon Jeong and
Jeremi Szaniawski*

The auteur, then ...

No longer the hegemonic audiovisual spectacle it once was, cinema has had to face many changes and challenges in the twenty-first century (not least its entanglement with capitalist globalization and post-medium digitization) in order to retain its value as a commercial form of entertainment. Yet as an art form, a status it still partly retains, it has also had to respond to a world full of new phenomena, all the while undergoing a set of deep transitions and crises. With this as our background, we look back on a motif and concern perennial since the early days of cinema: the auteur. It has evolved through the decades, has been put to rest by some schools, only to staunchly re-emerge time and again. The goal of the present volume is to propose the latest reassessment of the film auteur as “global” auteur: if *auteurism* has validity in this global age, it may express itself in the way film directors, old and new, capture the zeitgeist in a multi-layered and faceted world, overtly or covertly. The work of these cinematic auteurs, even unconsciously, signals various positions that film art takes regarding reality. We see here a twenty-first century version of *la politique des auteurs*—not a certain policy or politics of auteurs anymore so much as “the political” immanent to cinematic authorship. Our collection thus includes a variety of chapters by established and emerging scholars alike, which shed a timely light on the current situation, identifying some of the most important cinematic voices of the last fifteen years, recognizing recurrent trends and motifs, and defining what constitutes the newness of auteurism in this young twenty-first century.

Before moving on with our proposed redefinition of the concept, let us briefly reframe some crucial phases along with overlooked points in auteur theory from a standpoint that helps reach and enrich our discussion on

“why the auteur (and why now)?”¹ Indeed this question was the starting point of a score of dynamic polemics. As is well known, the 1950s *Cahiers du cinéma* critics initiated the political position of filmmakers’ authorship as equivalent to that of artists in other media. Their passionate spokesman François Truffaut glorified cinematic auteurs while condemning mere *metteurs-en-scène*, i.e. “stagers” who conventionally transposed literature onto the screen (Truffaut 1976). He criticized the same old names in the French tradition of “Quality” not simply for producing filmed literature without filmic originality, but rather for simplistically compromising great French literary works in order to serve the political doctrine of their day, as when Raymond Radiguet’s pre-war novel *The Devil in the Flesh* (*Le Diable au corps*, 1923) was turned into an anti-war film by Claude Autant-Lara (1947). Such political distortion indicated the political elements immanent in the field in which auteurism pursued its aesthetic program. Another noteworthy point is that the *cinéma de papa* didn’t even faithfully “stage” adaptations, due to its chronic omission of “unfilmable” literary scenes. Against this reductive case, Truffaut advocated a transformative approach, such as in Robert Bresson’s adaptation of Georges Bernanos’ *Diary of a Country Priest* (*Journal d’un curé de campagne*, 1951) handling the unfilmable through voice-over narration unfolding on a spiritual, blank screen; with the *caméra-stylo*, coined by Alexandre Astruc, the cinematic auteur could (re)write the original by fully delivering its verbal power while exceeding its non-visual limitation. This is why literature was “that obscure object of desire” for cinema, at once a counter-model to avoid and yet an ideal model to emulate. The authenticity of literary originals was not to be politically co-opted or visually truncated, but to be cinematically absorbed and elevated over all the limitations of literature.

In this sense, the dichotomy of “auteur vs. *metteur-en-scène*” may not directly involve the schematic belief whereby the former’s greatness lies in theme and content while the latter’s function remains the formal, stylistic adaptation of a pre-existing text into cinematic codes. Rather, the point was whether or not the transcendent potential of cinematic materiality was excavated in all its aspects. When successful, this experiment established an original outcome of theme-form chemistry whose governing principle is nested as much in narrative structure as in *mise-en-scène*.

The next phase of auteurism, “auteur-structuralism,” emerged in the heyday of linguistic and anthropological structuralism, negotiating the individualism of authorship with the collectivity of myth (Nowell-Smith 1974). This systematic approach illuminated the inherent coherence of the author’s textual corpus, but subsequently begged the question of its contextual parameters, leaving behind the quasi-mythical figure of the auteur. Prior to this phase, André Bazin had already defended “impure cinema” as naturally hosting hybrids, which required technological, socio-logical, historical approaches and captured “the genius of the system” as

the essence of Hollywood that could not be overshadowed by “the geniuses of the system” (Ford, Hawks, Welles, Hitchcock ...), whom his *Cahiers* disciples worshiped (Andrew 1992). Bazin’s *politique des auteurs* was also a *critique des auteurs*, a wise man’s warning against the fetishistic “cult of personality” that was rooted in the existentialist attachment of the early *Cahiers* to Sartrean authenticity (Bazin 1985). Some elitist aura surrounded the Americanization of auteurism as well; the famous feud between Andrew Sarris and Pauline Kael was about the theoretical criteria of film authorship, but both shared the critic’s obsession with the comparative ranking of directors (Stam 2000).

Subsequent backlashes against individual structuralist auteurism took various shapes and forms, which could be seen as branching out in three directions. First, broad attention was paid to “production conditions.” The geniuses of the system were viewed less as idiosyncratic directors than as functional producers who orchestrated scriptwriting, casting, editing, etc. in control and equilibrium, while struggling to negotiate between contradictory forces—actors, crew, and staff—whose contribution to filmmaking should not be overlooked (Schatz 2010). In short, a collectivist claim of varied human agents for the copyright of authorship challenged the romantic myth of personalized auteurism. Secondly, “constructivist contexts” were brought in to analyze the ways film texts are preconditioned by nonhuman agents such as genre, language, psyche, and sociopolitical culture. This trend became dominant along with the establishment of institutional film studies in academia and methodological film theory. The triangular frame of semiotics, psychoanalysis, and Marxism set up the common view of subjectivity as inherently split and complexly constructed, paving the way for feminism and postcolonialism, cultural studies and identity politics in contextualizing films and auteurs. Thirdly, contrary to these two outward directions, there was another, inward one, which highlighted “deconstructive intertexts.” Poststructuralism and postmodernism destabilized the belief in the author’s original vision while addressing the text as an indeterminate zone of contradictory meanings, a polyvocal texture of (un)conscious influences, or a rhizomatic hypertext of endless references. The copyright of authorship was, in theory, replaced by the “copyleft” of its pastiche and remix on a cultural database or hybrid network for rearranging high and low culture, old and new media, local and global variations in fusion.

This third tendency in particular implied the theoretical possibility of a shift of paradigm in auteurism. Michel Foucault viewed the “author function” as dissolving into anonymous discourse while “thickening” a text with duration, from its past and into an unknown future. For this reason, it could work as a “catalyst” with the potential to initiate a complex reaction among various elements (Wollen 1972). By pronouncing “the death of the author,” Roland Barthes defined the author as the byproduct of writing, its ephemeral textual effect. But this process also implies that writing happens

at the moment of reading, allowing the author to be thus reconfigured by the reader, opening receptive positions in a trans-subjective fashion (Barthes 1977). Likewise, a film would work as an enunciative, performative *écriture* through which the auteur as well as the viewer are simultaneously under (de)construction. Authorship would then perform its “postmortem” agency by increasing spectatorship in a shifting discursive configuration, at the crossroads of historically accumulated films and the ways in which they are received. In short, the death of the auteur signaled the birth of the spectator, with the next phase of auteurism emerging on the side of the audience.

This spectatorial turn, however, might not have wiped out the earlier models. Certainly auteurism has lost its semi-religious myth of independent creativity, but this does not attest to its real death. Declarations of such passing are most often of a rhetorical nature rather than founded in facts, and the cinema’s “hall of fame” has been shining with ever more directors-as-stars. Without changing its whole nature, auteurism may have survived as a sort of “palimpsest” bearing the traces of past characteristics (existential romanticism, individual structuralism, collective constructivism, poststructural postmodernism, ...), while maintaining aesthetic and political modernism as its core evaluative taste (Naremore 2004). In doing so, auteurism has also been completely institutionalized in film archives, mass media, festival circuits, academic curriculum, and even commercial theaters, to the extent that paradoxically it no longer triggers noteworthy polemics “because it has *won*” (Stam 2000). But conversely, all these signs of triumphant auteurism indicate the hidden bargaining power of the film audience; fans, critics, programmers, and professors revere, judge, select, and teach this or that auteur, whose name value plays a key role in entering the arena of film reception. The auteur is now a critical concept indispensable to distribution and marketing purposes, i.e. social interactions in a political economy beyond textual interpretation. Hollywood auteurs are strategic commercial agents endorsed by mass audience, like “brand names” that guide and stimulate their consumption. Rather than being rooted in the notion of fixed identity or autonomous authority, today’s auteur takes a multifaceted, modulable “agency” for organizing various modes of communication with its audience in the global market of film culture (Corrigan 1991).

More importantly for us, it might be possible to sense the shift of authorship from auteurs to audience in contemporary film theory. The audience in this case means scholars who weave auteurs into a systematic web of critical ideas. In a precursory mode, cognitive formalism approached the auteur as the one who expresses a personal vision and thus offers an “interpretative cue” (Bordwell 2002); phenomenology of embodiment, after psychoanalytic apparatus theory, entirely moved the theoretical focus from the camera-director relation to the screen-spectator relation (Sobchack 1992). Gilles Deleuze brought an ontological turn to film theory

by arranging numerous auteurs in a Bergsonian-Peircean system of sign-images and treating their names as markers for mapping “philosophemes” immanent to the screen (Deleuze 1986, 1989). Since then, the past two decades have seen “the Deleuzian century” come to film studies, first in the strict application of his vocabulary to theory and analysis, and then in the broad sense of what his legacy represents, i.e. film as/with/through philosophy. Jacques Rancière reframed many of the auteurs Deleuze discussed in his own aesthetic schema; Slavoj Žižek psychoanalyzed auteurs from Alfred Hitchcock to Krzysztof Kieślowski in an updated Lacanian structure; Jean-Luc Nancy meditated on Abbas Kiarostami and inspired Claire Denis’ filmmaking ... Influenced by such cinephilic philosophers’ works, “film philosophy” emerged within film studies. Here, auteurs often appear as the agents who carry philosophical concepts or even philosophers in their own right, whose works in turn crucially frame our thinking and writing about them. This is where film scholars sometimes play the role of meta-level auteurs by juggling both multiple cinematic and philosophical auteurs, while their individual authorship is blended into a set of debatable, negotiable, reconfigurable parameters for film thinking.

This double spectatorial turn of authorship to agency, in film culture (industry/institution) on the one hand and in film studies (theory/philosophy) on the other, is the current phase that we attempt to update and reformulate in terms of the “political” immanent to auteurs and their cinematic engagement with the world. Here, the auteur as agent launches a mini-network that is not meant to determine an original or ultimate meaning, but to subject itself to sociohistorical ideologies, cultural voices, technological conditions through which meaning is motivated, rationalized, mediated, or reconstructed between an auteur and an audience. Consequently, today’s authorship is no less powerful as agency than before, orchestrating various forces while continuing to play an overall formative role. It has the important merit of being “real” as speaking subject, and “differential” on film (Naremore 2004). In short, this agency is a key currency that still applies everywhere in the global “matrix” of film discourses, be it commercial or academic, in relation to its real-world surroundings—that of globalization.

... and “now, auteur?”

We now return to our initial questions. Why the auteur? And why now? Because the auteur’s agency renders concrete and universal, if subjectively so, this global matrix of film discourse. It can capture, embody, and typify a “concrete universality” of today’s world (cinema), sometimes even unbeknownst to auteurs

themselves. Cinema is now the most vulnerably attentive, yet active respondent to global capitalism and digital convergence, but unlike other media, it also generates (sufficient attention to) auteurs who can sustain critically meaningful or artistically transformative stances. This potential enables us to better understand the immanent plane of political positions and ideologies around cinema, which might not be effectively accessible when only looking at films under other, apparently more trendy rubrics such as art cinema, film festivals, transnational media, etc. How do these institutional platforms operate? Thomas Elsaesser's comprehensive chapter opening this book testifies to the ongoing, updated importance of the auteur in answering this question, by theorizing the new mode of auteurist agency defined as "performative self-contradiction" in creative constraints, somewhat resonating with emergent studies on cinema's industrial allegories.

By extension, with regard to specific auteurs, William Brown addresses Michael Winterbottom as a "self-effacing auteur," who resists being pigeonholed in a given genre or style, and whose eclectic collaborations pave the way for a new terrain between cinema and non-cinema, including the use of "impure" digital technologies (today, the new norm). Following Fatih Akin's trajectory from his early shorts to his latest epic, Dudley Andrew highlights the aesthetic channeling of the director's double identity split between Germany and Turkey, culture and blood, into a global Mobius strip of "moral geometry." Consuelo Lins looks at Eduardo Coutinho, a vibrant auteur of Brazilian documentary cinema whose "(self-)fabulation" rejuvenated the medium at the twilight of his life with minimalistic means, giving back the cinema not so much its "body" as its voice. Discussing Anurag Kashyap, an influential voice in contemporary Indian cinema, Khaushik Bhaumik offers a political view on both his film and business world in terms of "migration," which permeates the times of globalization. Victor Fan reveals how Jia Zhangke's auteurism challenges the notions of autonomy, subjectivity, and individuality that characterize Chinese "independent cinema," while opening a deindividuated, desubjectivized biopolitical zone of precarious (or "naked") life. And focusing on Kurosawa Kiyoshi, Aaron Gerow explores the discursive context in which the Japanese director's elusive auteurism resists the critic's paranoia of interpretation, opening up onto multiple ambiguities on the threshold of "dis/continuity," and playing with "ghostly" meaning.

Above this individual level of auteurism renewing cultural politics in filmmaking, there is a collective level where the generation-as-auteur in particular presents and inspires political thinking, even beyond film culture. In fact, this has been a salient feature from the inception of auteurism on: the Young Turks of the French New Wave, by denouncing "Dad's cinema" as dead cinema, visibly accounted, for the first time in film history, for the power of a generation of auteurs. Their cinephilic experience of film

viewing and writing led to quasi-Oedipal patricidal filmmaking, while exhibiting diverse manifestations of a new, “breathless” spirit. The generational frame thus works like a collective platform of singular authorship: the generation generates the genius. It opens a middle ground between individual and social forces, where different auteurs share a context of sociopolitical events, technological innovations, and cultural sensibilities. “Sharing,” i.e. neither simply absorbing/transcending those conditions in self-organizing uniqueness, nor being totally shaped/constrained by them as otherness that organizes the self, may have led to the formation of their auteuristic self-awareness. The generation is an interface for this experience, as in the cases of postwar generation Italian neorealists, Baby Boom New American Film directors, “fifth generation” Chinese cinema auteurs, etc. Likewise, the various New Waves that swept Germany, Czechoslovakia, Cuba, Brazil, Japan, Taiwan, and so on, would not have occurred without a bold young generation’s broad, political self-positioning and engagement in their country via international influences.

It should be noted that generational auteurism does not overlook individual differences. The oft-encountered (and unavoidable) tension between centripetal collectivity and centrifugal individuality causes less antagonistic opposition than various other articulations of a generational spirit. The singularities of these “collective auteurs” are spontaneously formed through different aesthetic attitudes, political inclinations, or personal characters in response to shared experience. So we can draw a cinematic map of aesthetic and political subtleties that “color” the generation. But despite this pluralist value, the collective auteur is more than the sum of different auteurs, developing its own history through, yet beyond, that of its members. Methodologically, their mapping can be not just a synchronic arrangement of various auteuristic positions, but also a diachronic narrativization of their agendas and motifs, pathologies and impasses, failures and potentials in the dialectic process of raising questions and seeking answers from the critic’s perspective. While objectively arranging multiple auteurs, the generational approach subjectively engages in making them a collective auteur—a critical creature. In this manner, Seung-hoon Jeong projects globally-known South Korean auteurs through the prism of the so-called “386 generation,” mapping a political matrix of allegorical violence and, from its double bind, drawing some ethical potential of “abject agency” to perform alternative modes of life and community. Dominique Nasta also maps contemporary Romanian auteurs who share the political legacy of communism as a sort of generational memory, while rethinking it through the minimalist aesthetics of “irony and reflexivity.” Though focusing on one particular director—Wojtek Smarzowski—in her study of auteurism in Poland, Izabela Kalinowska similarly engages with “politics of abjection,” deeply informed by the traumatic events that marked the 1980s, under the impetus of a decadent totalitarian regime. Poland’s experience clearly

resonates here with similar traumatic events in Korea and Romania, each informing their own generation of auteurs.

The new, multifaceted phase of film authorship we are witnessing today, in relation to the current world and film academia, merits an even wider range of case studies. These map out political implications in which major contemporary film auteurs (make us) reflect on twenty-first century issues, including in highly philosophical ways or in terms of aestheticized space and style. They then reframe the heritage of cinematic auteurism beyond mere aesthetic and formal mannerism and philosophically reinvigorate the political position of cinema. For example, Dan Hassler-Forest reviews Richard Linklater's independent films in terms of socioeconomic allegories, exploring how his portrayals of daily life in American (youth) culture tacitly resist postmodern nostalgia and challenge capitalism's purported timelessness, all the while reflecting neoliberalism's "war on time." John Pitseys' chapter on Quentin Tarantino is another historical elucidation of American auteurism in which the "American contract" rooted in slavery is cinematically retraced with its self-contradictory biopolitical base of lawlessness and violence. Regarding European auteurs, Robert Sinnerbrink reframes Lars von Trier's auteurism as a cinematic "anti-philosophy" that provokes, perverts, and satirizes the classical category of philosophy, playing on its mannerist application, particularly in his latest *Depression or Trauma* Trilogy. Not altogether differently, Nico Baumbach's analysis of Abbas Kiarostami suggests various ways in which what he calls the Iranian auteur's "shareable cinema" can be readdressed through a web of philosophical discourses on film theory and aesthetics along with their political implications.

Let us now point out three major layers that this book implies. First, it addresses some of the most sophisticated voices of current world cinema in terms of elements which reshape our lives, such as the two sides of globalization: ever more globalized communities inevitably generate ever more globalized threats, including to themselves. At the same time, individual, collective, even human identities, along with traditional values (familial, local, cultural, or religious) undergo various changes. The task at hand is not simply to read cinematic representations of such agendas, but to offer an in-depth discussion through cinema by testing and retheorizing diverse interdisciplinary discourses on, and suggesting critiques or alternatives to, these ideas. Our contributors thus attempt a dialogical interplay between discourse and cinema, analyzing films partly as a springboard for critical engagement in debates on biopower and violence, capitalism and revolution, technology and catastrophe, etc. ... extending to further inquiries on what *polis* can mean broadly when politics, rightist or leftist, loses or fails in utopian projects, and what political or fundamentally ethical community can be imagined in ways of redefining utopia.

Secondly, this volume highlights, in an age whose complexity has rendered straightforwardly political cinema obsolete or trite, films that

are allegorical in varying degrees or seem to have little to do with real-world concerns at first glance. This yields a cognitive mapping of the political matrix that could reveal an unconscious ideology or paradigm and its cinematically virtualized reality through an aesthetic imaginary, as well as its political potential or deadlock when confronted with actual reality. Consequently, we ask how art relates to the world, what art can or should do in/outside, for/against the world. Art film seems ever less capable of answering this question and proposing alternatives (especially when compared to its politically charged past, as well as to the ever more dominating mainstream industries and new media culture), all the while being more urgently pressed to answer it in its critical and emancipatory capacity. In this sense, the book illuminates how cinema aesthetically philosophizes politics, or how its aesthetics make us think of politics philosophically. The growing scholarship in film (and) philosophy serves as the rich resource for this task. Many chapters thus perform philosophical experiments with films so that, as a whole, the book may insinuate a matrix of philosophical concepts and ideas as both the basis and confinement of current film scholars' thinking systems.

Thirdly, by extension, and with the legacy of Deleuze in mind, we suggest that today's auteurs are philosophical thinkers who are also politically attuned observers and apt craftsmen or artists. Rather than unique individuals whose voice and filmography build an autonomous corpus, they could be viewed as an entry point into the matrix of philosophemes (especially aesthetic, biopolitical, and ethical) that are rendered in their thematic or stylistic motifs. There, their specificities may be (re)contextualized along with other auteurs in synchronic linkage more than in terms of their own diachronic lineage to past auteurs. Our contributors creatively traverse the corpora of multiple directors even when focusing on a single auteur, when such contextualization highlights their matrix rather than serves as a tool to judge their discrete output. This auteurism, hardly obsessed with aesthetic evaluation or with building a hierarchical canon, brings different layers of and approaches to the matrix of auteurs, in order to cinematically rethink pressing world issues together.

Through the course of twenty chapters, a constellation of views and ideas emerges, amounting to all the overarching points mentioned above. In this framework, the scope of *The Global Auteur* goes beyond the traditional realm of art film, ranging from Hollywood to European to Asian auteurs and more. These films have been more or less widely circulated at least since 2000, impressively charged with remarkable signs and symptoms of the phenomena that the book seeks to explore. Although many of them can be aligned with the Second Cinema tradition of art film, their authorship grows beyond the boundaries of fine craftsmanship or *art pour l'art*, and constitutes a genuine philosophical and political matrix which exceeds the works of individuals. We have, therefore, strategically distributed the

representativeness of our contributors' auteurs of choice according not only to their significance, but also to geographic consideration. Unsurprisingly given the topic, the lion's share goes to Europe and Asia.²

Of certain tendencies in global cinema (a plea for the auteur in the twenty-first century)

Let us now note a few other key features of today's auteur cinema. Indisputably one of the most important phenomena in the art cinema of the last twenty years (and oftentimes enabled by digital technologies) is the technique of the long take: the reader will find it illustrated in the films, noted for their epic length, of Philippino director Lav Diaz, discussed here by Marco Grosoli. Productively using Heideggerian quotes in Diaz's corpus, Grosoli argues that the extreme running time in his films cancels out time itself in favor of space, yet in an anti-postmodern gesture, calling upon Fredric Jameson in the process. Reaching for the corpus of another director noted for his use of the long take, Jameson himself shows how the vectorial quality in Aleksey Gherman's films (in its unrelenting left-to-right movement, i.e. its "suffocating kinesis"), as well as its highly textural and sensorial depictions of refuse and other abject situations, resist being reduced to the principle of aestheticization, and the "reign of beauty" it underpins. In so doing, Gherman's cinema also resists postmodernism's insidious regime of commodification.

One could argue also that the cinema of the long take features interesting echoes of Deleuze's legacy. Several of our contributors make use of some of his most relevant and illuminating concepts, and propose to look at several major recent films as a renegotiating the "time-image," the idiom Deleuze coined and identified as the major philosophical import of cinema in the post-World War II era. What is suggested instead is a new type of "space-and-time image." Other contemporary practitioners of the long take in whose works we witness the predominance of spatiality over temporality include celebrated figures such as Tsai Ming-Liang, Béla Tarr, Alexander Sokurov, or Hou Hsiao-Hsien.

Although not reviewed at length in the book, another director of global prominence and who merits attention at this juncture is Nuri Bilge Ceylan, who embodies at least three major tendencies of contemporary auteur cinema. First, as the figures mentioned above, he is a practitioner of the long take. In addition to this, like several other directors reprised in the book, Ceylan keeps referencing major auteurs of Second Cinema/modernity, from Andrey Tarkovsky to Bresson, in a way that can at once be regarded as postmodern pastiche and some attempt to regain the depth of these prestigious predecessors. It is indeed a testament of our times

that pastiching great auteurs of the past is no longer regarded as a playful gesture only (as was eminently the case with the postmodern film movement that spans from the late 1960s to the 1990s, from Jean-Luc Godard and Brian De Palma to Jim Jarmusch and Tarantino), but also as a marker of some significance, moral or otherwise. For this reason, Ceylan's reverent nods seem a symptom of global capitalism rather than a resistance to it. His is a beautifully engineered, informed, and intellectually rich cinema, but penetrated by a spirit of "humanism" which we note but hesitate to commend, all the more because a similar phenomenon is at work in a more transparently post-humanistic and "global" auteur, Carlos Reygadas. In his chapter, Michael Cramer examines how Reygadas' attempts at creating a dehistoricized, phenomenologically immediate cinema of presence are blocked by historical realities, while his narratives both comment upon and seek to overcome this tension in an attempt to "bargain" for the continued existence of art cinema to which, like Ceylan's, his films have been compared.

What the films of Ceylan and Reygadas, replete with references to the same canonical figures, teach us, is that while there is no shortage of important or supremely talented auteurs in our contemporary cinematic landscape, the cultural zeitgeist and environment of the last fifteen years has hardly been conducive to a rekindling of the success of the modernist masters of the 1960s. The yearning caused by this state of things is easy to understand based on just the most cursory comparison of that period with the early twenty-first century. And while the thinkers and ideologues of Third Cinema decried auteurism and Second Cinema as conservative and bourgeois, today, by the proverbial shift of the pendulum, such a "conservative" approach might resonate with an unexpected community spirit. Could cinema, then, however implausible and even paradoxical the proposition, still foster community in an age of neoliberalism? The latter crushes and reshapes unfavorably not only social movements, the Humanities, but also humans and their environment themselves, positing the domination of sovereignty over bare life, as attested to in the studies here by Bhaumik, Fan, and Jeong. Yet the attempts to channel the great spirit of cinematic humanism—Carl Theodor Dreyer, Ingmar Bergman, Bresson, Tarkovsky, and others—by their postmodern "equivalents" seems to have become an act of failed utopianism: cinema is doing fine commercially, but has lost something essential—its body (celluloid)—and so it reaches out for its former soul, as it were.

The third major tendency embodied by Ceylan, and in our view the most interesting one in his case, truly justifying his significance beyond mere cultural and festival politics, stems directly from the transition from film to digital. Experimenting with the way light, movement, and textures are registered by digital cameras, Ceylan has created beautiful photographic compositions for his films, which straddle analog/celluloid

modes of representation and cinematography, and propose a new type of digital indexicality and realism for the twenty-first century. In this sense, the Turkish director also emphasizes the transfer from time to space, or its intermediateness, as the digital image seems to have much more in common with liquid textures than celluloid. The flow of digital imagery, now ubiquitous on the millions of devices used for telecommunication, is only contained with great difficulty by cinema as a medium that tries to survive the demise of its favored support for a century—35mm.

The onset of digital cinema has hitherto procured only a few interesting and truly compelling innovations, remaining all too often at the level of gimmick. And yet the uninterrupted flow of data proposed by digital lends itself eminently to a new cinematic sublime, encountered so far mostly in films resorting to the faux long-take technique (in truth digitally stitched), sometimes producing a film seemingly captured in one serpentine camera movement. We find this false long-take in the efforts of “Hollywood Mexican” filmmakers (Alfonso Cuarón—*Children of Men* [2006], *Gravity* [2013] and Alejandro González Iñárritu—*Birdman* [2014], *The Revenant* [2015]), or in the often reviled films of Gaspar Noé. The Argentina-born Frenchman has inherited not only an obsession with Stanley Kubrick (unrelentingly referencing *2001: A Space Odyssey* [1968] throughout his oeuvre), but also used the technology to recreate a phenomenology of narcotics through his cinema, from alcohol (*I Stand Alone* [*Seul contre tous*, 1999]), cocaine and amphetamines (*Irreversible* [*Irréversible*, 2002]), DMT and other hallucinogenic drugs (*Enter the Void*, 2009), and cannabis and opium (in the touchingly humorous *Love* [2015], which resorts to 3D to interestingly soften deep focus). What Noé does is symptomatic of the many contemporary auteurs referencing their cinematic idols, not least Jonathan Glazer and Paul Thomas Anderson with Kubrick. Yet instead of trying to “match the brain” of his idol, Noé turns out to be surprisingly clever in embracing sensations over cognitive skills. Indeed, he takes the Kubrickian heritage of the “screen as brain” (Deleuze 1989) and remaps it as a reptilian brain, or nervous system-cinema, proposing one of the most cogent “images” in the twenty-first century, thereby reducing the philosophical sublime of Kubrick’s oeuvre to the quintessentially superficial sublime of the digital imagery. Under its texture, however, lies the truly sublime, namely the frightening primacy and hypothetical infinity of numbers and binary codes, whose essential, brutal simplicity undermines the potential richness of its endless ramifications, being in this the exact opposite of analog cinema.

Considering as we do that the phenomenological (and, in the future, material too, as has been decried by countless film archivists around the world) loss entailed by the shift to digital capture and projection is incommensurable, we are of the opinion that the effort by studios and distributors, as opposed to the grand pomp surrounding the shift to sound

and color technologies, to pretend that nothing has changed is fraught and complicit with the logic of corporate capitalism (and somewhat analogous to the gradual and surreptitious attrition of democracy in the West). In this sense, although the nostalgic and fetishistic gesture of auteurs such as Tarantino or Christopher Nolan to keep on using and screening celluloid might come across as charming, it is inescapably bound to fail: at best, celluloid film will occupy the same position in our culture as do vinyl records and polaroid cameras.

Compelling efforts to use intermediality and experiment in a novel way with digital cinema can be found in the works of the late Godard, surely the only director in the world to have managed to remain philosophically and politically relevant over six decades.³ Godard's latest (and hopefully not last) *Goodbye to Language* (*Adieu au langage*, 2015) is reviewed here by Rick Warner for its political and philosophical momentous implications as well as for its innovative use of 3D, reflecting on the medium's (and human) history, capitalism, and death. The Swiss dandy, the marginal, "autistic man" (as he has referred to himself in an interview) has always been a global and central figure of auteur cinema, yet one operating from a specific niche, at once global (working with various established producers and necessarily co-opted through channels of film distribution, festivals, etc.) and local (producing independently and from the fringe). Steadfastly denouncing the workings and ills of contemporary capitalism, embracing at once an Internationalist stance and a very French Republican approach to critical discourse—turning cinema into an essay, at once deep philosophical and satirical—Godard's biting critique and pessimism may be more relevant today than ever before.

In an age where global organisms in the service or promotion of corporate capitalism increasingly reduce the sovereignty and autonomy of smaller nations, where the concept of nation-state is increasingly derided or decried (promoting at once delocalization and regionalist reflexes), film nations are nonetheless still a hot currency. Whereas the United States, France, Sweden, Italy, the Soviet Union, and Japan dominated the art-film festival circuit in the 1950s and 1960s, today it is auteurs hailing from China, Taiwan, Korea, India, Iran, Turkey, or Belgium and Romania, who reap the benefits of the national figure in the global age, and of the various mutations and migrations of cultural policies and financing infrastructures of art cinema. Conversely, some cinemas work on a local basis, and some auteurs do not travel beyond the boundaries of their national market, even in the frame of cinemas which otherwise experience a globalist expansion.⁴ On this note, another example worthy of investigation which we regret not being able to include would be Portugal, from Manoel de Oliveira's flamboyant final decade to the very contrasted works of Pedro Costa and Miguel Gomes; or Greece, after Theo Angelopoulos, in the experiments of Athina Rachel Tsangari or Yorgos Lanthimos.

Invigorating though they may be, national art cinemas such as the ones delineated above are unfortunately rapidly co-opted and sapped of their vitality by the way in which festival circuits (their main “clients/promoters”) have evolved over the years. Naturally festivals are influenced by their sponsors and the personalities of their directors, and a proper history of the politics of major film festivals (Cannes, Venice, Berlin, etc.) would be interesting in charting a shift from leftist to more conservative allegiances through the years. Nonetheless, the rule of thumb today seems to be crude marketability, which has become the almost exclusive measure of a work’s success, so that more and more, auteur or Second Cinema has fallen prey to formulaic reflexes. As a consequence, while in the past young filmmakers were inspired by and successful on the basis of an originality and power of vision drawn from models who were almost systematically commercially non-viable, yet relayed in festivals, art-house theaters, etc. (Dreyer and Bresson being cases in point), today’s popular cinema tastes are shaped by the most recent box office hits, and it seems difficult to fathom something of the Sirk/Fassbinder nexus emerging today, or even for a filmmaker presenting a truly innovative view to be able, without the proper connections, to conduct a successful career in film.

It seems quite clear that cinema will require drastic and revolutionary movements, both aesthetically and politically, if it is to survive as a major medium. Nonetheless, we must mitigate our pessimism: on the one hand, cinema is undergoing a profound technological and political/philosophical transition, a context in which a lot is lost but a lot can be also gained. On the other hand, not all is grim in its current landscape. Asian cinema has produced a wealth of new idioms, stimulating and sometimes auspiciously crossing-over into the West. Female auteurs the world over are often successfully reinjecting major innovations into the medium, not least through the combination of documentary and fiction, with invigorating cases including the late Chantal Akerman and Valérie Massadian (though it should be noted that any artistic tendency is always at risk of becoming cliché or kitsch, as in the films of Byambasuren Davaa). New shooting-star-like auteurs may also be born and vanish just as rapidly through channels of self-promotion and distribution (Youtube, Vimeo, etc.). In this maelstrom of data and names, the struggle not only to produce but to exist as an auteur has either been scandalously facilitated by indulgent nepotism (from Sofia Coppola and Jason Schwartzman to Léa Seydoux and Mélanie Laurent, from Vincent Cassel to Jeremy Renner) or rendered incrementally difficult, nigh impossible. Digital technology entails that producing a feature film has become somewhat cheaper, but there is a flip side to this coin: even the wealth of small- and medium-size festivals sprouting around the world cannot absorb the mass of films currently vying for attention, in an age when almost literally everyone has access to a camera, and can thus potentially become an “auteur.”

In view of the above, the recognized auteurs reviewed through the pages of this book are no doubt privileged, even pampered figures, but they can also be regarded as enjoying a far less cushy status: that of actors of a thankless yet truly heroic age of a medium at once exhausted and in deep transformation. Since the early 2000s, filmmakers have had to take on a very substantial challenge: on the technological level, they are confronted with the digitization of filming, editing, post-production, and projection/distribution. On the financial level, cinema, like every other form of entertainment, is undergoing the maximization algorithms of corporate capitalism, the complexity of which is reflected only negatively, in asinine scripts, product-placement, and shift from the juvenilization of culture and audiences (a 1980s phenomenon) to the infantilizing of culture and coterminous re-education of audiences in the twenty-first century (from as early as the cradle, courtesy of new tablet and touch-screen technologies).

The sway of global capitalism, alongside the countless ills it has brought upon culture, is also more insidiously killing the *wunderkammer* effect of cinema as a “cabinet of curiosities,” as surely as it is turning the *wunderkammer’s* other heir, museums, into luna-parks including the now inevitable haptic technologies and even “selfie-spots.” It is not surprising, in this context, that the new home of cinemplexes has become the global shopping mall, and the home of many auteurs including Akerman, Godard, and Kiarostami, the art gallery—a milieu with different, but often equally fraught implications and pitfalls. Conversely, some gallery artists have made successful incursions into recent cinema, particularly Steve McQueen. But to the surrealist and pop provocations of Marcel Broodthaers and Andy Warhol, McQueen has opposed an explicitly political cinema, in the most traditional and vernacular meaning of the word (*Hunger* [2008], *Shame* [2011], *Twelve Years a Slave* [2013]), as beautiful and thematically contemporaneous (political prisoners, sex addiction, racism) as it seems either completely out of touch, or uncomfortably tight with twenty-first century realpolitik. In this latter case, one would see the dangerous flirting of art cinema with the garish “causes” industry and “human-rightism,” i.e. the commodification of human suffering and social injustices.

In an age where the divide between left and right is increasingly flaunted and washed out in favor of global corporate and militaristic interests, overtly “political” cinema may seem an almost laughable concept. To be sure, there are auteurs, such as Jafar Panahi, who practice a cinema that is still political, well into the very flesh of its makers—but they are the exception to the rule. We still want to insist that cinema continues to have a social and political role, marginal and decreasing though it may be. Our collection features several examples of auteurs, celebrated both as global in the conventional and even commercial sense of the term, who attempt to return, sometimes through indirect ways, politics to cinema. For instance, Rachel Gabara reviews Abderrahmane Sissako’s films and explores how

African cinema both embraced and rejected the *politique des auteurs*, setting it up to resist the inevitable cohesion into an oeuvre, following Bazin's question, "Auteur, yes, but what of?" This constitutes a political, if discreet, gesture in its own right. Several other chapters in the book show that the power of cinema to stir our political fiber is not extinguished altogether, and that, paradoxically, the medium that is most closely related to global capitalism is also the one that can occasionally bite the hand that feeds it. Perhaps it is at a time of least explicit political meaningfulness and "power" that cinema might become the most profoundly political, and not only just in its unconscious, as Jeremi Szaniawski argues in his chapter on Michael Haneke and Aleksey Balabanov, and their take on the intruder, meant to obliquely illuminate and educate their audience, and resonating deeply with our current geopolitical situation.

If cinema is to overcome the third and most important crisis of its relatively short but plentiful existence, then our 2000–15 period will be remembered as one in which, by virtue of their non-renouncing creativity (of not defaulting to the sirens of television and easily consumed, indeed "binge watched" TV shows), many of the auteurs tackled here will have become (unwittingly perhaps) resisters in their own right. In hindsight, the relatively minor innovations witnessed in the films of Haneke or Von Trier, Balabanov or Gherman, Jia or Diaz, or even Tarantino and Linklater will appear as crucial in having maintained a continuity, a human chain within the history of cinema.

Such efforts of creative resistance can be operated on the most discreet, tentative, or speculative and relativistic level, far from the grand "end of the world" narratives that have mushroomed in Hollywood and European cinema of late (and which, as Jameson deftly argues in these pages, "far from warning of apocalypse, [have] rather ... transformed it into an object of consumption and satisfaction"). Yet for all the aestheticized efforts to cosmetize or even camouflage the truth, the shift, technological and societal, is here indeed. This may explain the emergence, almost as a category in its own right, of cinematic "thought experiments" in contemporary cinema (Elsaesser 2015). For a variety of reasons it suggests cinema's confrontation, perhaps for the second time in its history (after World War II and neorealism), with a new need to thoroughly reassess reality, trying to decipher, understand, and make sense of the conundrum presented to mankind in the age of corporate capitalism. In the process, the role of the auteur is not only fraught, thankless, and in the shadow of its glorious predecessors: it may be more crucial and relevant than ever.

If we can agree that each generation of historically important auteurs came of age about fifteen to twenty years following a major technological shift, then our group of "transitional auteurs" (2000–15) is deserving of particular attention. They keep on producing relevant films at a time when

cinema is renegotiating its very nature in major ways. Their films no longer occupy the same place in the collective imaginary as did those of the great masters of the silent period (D. W. Griffith, F. W. Murnau, Fritz Lang, etc.) and the great modern auteurs (Jean Renoir, Roberto Rossellini, Ozu Yasujiro, Federico Fellini, Hitchcock, Welles, Bergman, Godard, etc.), nor even the “easy riders and raging bulls” of the New Hollywood (Martin Scorsese, De Palma, etc.), or the indie/postmodern generation championed by Sundance/Miramax (Steven Soderbergh, the Coen Brothers, Jarmusch, Tarantino, etc.).⁵ This is because, returning to where we began, cinema is not only undergoing a transitional phase, but has de facto lost its place as the major medium of its time. With realism if not humility, its makers have taken a new turn where authorship has been “constellated”: from the vernacular modernism of auteurs to those who still hold fast to an idea of film as art which at once harks back to the past and tries to look into the future.

Should this book have a legacy, it will be that the filmmakers under scrutiny herein will appear as significant a generation from now as they do today. Even if their influence might not be as substantial as that of their glorious predecessors, perhaps their role in keeping film as art (however fraught the concept) alive, is one of the most relevant, and paradoxically progressive ones they could have taken upon themselves, in an otherwise dishearteningly co-opted global environment.

Notes

- 1 For a comprehensive history of the concept, see, among others, Caughie 1981, Bazin 1985, Grant 2008.
- 2 We must note the obvious: the present collection suffers from a conspicuous imbalance, dealing almost exclusively with male auteurs. We had originally reached out to a wide range of potential contributors to write about other auteurs, including female and LGBT figures of note (such as Chantal Akerman, Lucrecia Martel, Andrea Arnold, Claire Denis, as well as Apitchatpong Weerasethakul, Wong Kar-wai, Gus Van Sant, ...), but these scholars declined to participate in our book, or were not available. We can redirect the reader to a range of recent key works which will help complement the work of our collection, including but not limited to: Patricia White, *Women's Cinema, World Cinema: Projecting Contemporary Feminisms* (Durham: Duke UP, 2015); Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt, *Queer Cinema in the World* (Durham: Duke UP, 2016); Sophie Mayer, *Political Animals: The Future of Feminist Cinema* (London: IB Tauris, 2015); Sue Clayton and Laura Mulvey, eds. *Other Cinemas: Culture and Experimental film in the 1970s* (London: IB Tauris, 2017). Lastly, it should be pointed out that Ivone Margulies and Jeremi Szaniawski are working on a collection on female filmmakers, also forthcoming with Bloomsbury, which will at once respond to and complement the present volume.

- 3 A fellow great French auteur we wish to acknowledge here is, of course, Alain Resnais. While Godard evolved from a pointed and sharp but juvenile and “romantic” cinema to the radical political cinema of the later years, we observe in Resnais the exact chiasmic opposite process: from the serious, almost ponderous and mature films of the 1960s to *Wild Grass* (*Les herbes folles*, 2009) and *You Ain’t Seen Nothin’ Yet* (*Vous n’avez encore rien vu*, 2012), films which seem to have been made by a young man. The same can be said of another great master who made some of his most remarkable films in the last fifteen years: Manoel de Oliveira. Enjoying a renaissance in his eighties, Oliveira brought back Portuguese cinema, not without the precious help and networks of France-based producer Paulo Branco, onto the world stage.
- 4 Kalinowska hints at this divide in her chapter, pitting two national auteurs (Andrzej Wajda and Smarzowski) against a transnational and/or global auteur such as Oscar-winner Paweł Pawlikowski.
- 5 Once counter-cultural outsiders who took over the system, or successfully operated from its fringes, most successful auteurs of New Hollywood and the “indie” generation have become established figures of the culture industry. Representatives of a status quo, they capitalize on their status of auteur as brand name, and the prestige associated with the moments that saw them emerge on the global stage.

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1

The global author: Control, creative constraints, and performative self-contradiction

Thomas Elsaesser

The author: Impossible and indispensable

There are many reasons why the concept of the auteur, as it applies to the film director, should not be carried over into the twenty-first century. First of all, because it has always been a contested notion, serving sometimes highly polemical and partisan agendas under unique historical circumstances (e.g. first in post-war Europe, then in 1970s Hollywood). Secondly, while it was strategically useful when helping film and cinema studies gain a foothold in the academy by modeling itself on literary studies and art history, this objective had been (over-)achieved by the mid-1980s, by which time the historical conditions of the original auteur theory (i.e. validating Hollywood's popular art by employing high-culture criteria) also no longer applied. Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, film-, media-, and cultural-studies programs were eagerly inaugurated everywhere in higher education, in order to come to the rescue of humanities departments and to provide training for the ever-expanding "creative" media industries.

Cultural studies in particular had little need of the individual author, having shifted attention from creation and production to reception and spectatorship: works of art as well as of popular culture (which meant art cinema and the mainstream) were assumed to be social texts carrying ideologically encoded messages, and thus had larger systems, e.g. capitalism

or patriarchy, as their “authors.” Such deconstructions (and “deaths”) of the author were theoretically supported by no less authoritative authors than Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, who in turn provided models of analysis that supported close readings of specific texts without resorting to self-expression, intentionality, or individual moral and legal accountability.¹

No doubt, there are even more pertinent philosophical reasons why authorship is such a vexing problem for a popular and collaborative art such as the cinema, and why it should be dropped from the list of important topics, quite apart from the industrial and capitalist context in which filmmaking has invariably taken place.² None of these critiques are new nor have they been laid to rest,³ yet precisely because even art cinema has become thoroughly pervaded by market considerations, the author debate deserves another look. Given that the film director as author, and the author as auteur have survived even the most well-founded set of counter-arguments, one can only conclude that being philosophically problematic and conceptually vague merely reinforces the author’s indispensability, both as a reality and as a concept. In fact, more than ever, (film) authorship is taken for granted, filling an evident gap by fulfilling its “author-function” (Foucault), which at its most basic rests on the assumption that the work (the film) in question possesses a degree of coherence and purposiveness, which convention and the need for meaning like to attribute to a nameable instance and an origin—the author.⁴ This author-function was initially more important to film critics and scholars than to the directors themselves (many Hollywood veteran directors were baffled and amused, before they became flattered and intrigued by the French *politique des auteurs*). Responding to such disconnect between person and function, authorship was redefined as implicit and inferred, rather than expressive and embodied. The author, famously, became an “effect of the text,” a “necessary fiction,” a projection and over-identification by the enthusiastic cinephile, requiring one to carefully (and ontologically) separate John Ford from “John Ford”—the latter the sum of the narrative structures and stylistic effects that the critic was able to assemble around a body of work “signed” by a given director. Yet in subsequent decades, as the director as auteur increasingly became a fixture of the popular media’s general personality cult, the author began doing duty not only as the (imaginary or real) anchor for presumed, perceived, or projected coherence, but was actively deployed as a brand name and marketing tool, for the commercial film industry as well as in the realm of independent and art cinema.

Questions of access and control

Adding the word “global” to “author” reflects this shift of register which raises the stakes, and acknowledges that “global” applies to both